

## Meeting examines Web safety

**By Beth Gollob Staff Writer**

WARR ACRES — With children being some of the most savvy Internet users, passwords, firewalls and other measures aren't always enough to protect them, U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook said Thursday.

In the first of a series of town hall meetings across the state, Istook, R-Warr Acres, state schools Superintendent Sandy Garrett and a child safety group representative spoke at Putnam City High School about the dangers of Internet predators and tools for parents to keep children safe.

"We're trying to teach them that anyone you meet online is a stranger, period," said Christina Slenk, education and training director for Web Wise Kids, based in Santa Ana, Calif.

The nonprofit organization was founded in 1998 in response to founder Tracey O'Connell's experience with Internet predators. In 1996, her then 15-year-old sister was missing for four months after a 27-year-old man used the Internet to lure her away from her family, Slenk said.

Since then, more than 750,000 children nationwide and roughly 30,000 Oklahoma children have used the organization's education program "Missing," Slenk said.

The program is a game designed for fifth- through ninth-graders in which players help locate a missing child lured away by a predator. The story is based on that of a Canadian boy lured to California by a pedophile.

Istook said child safety on the Internet is a very important topic, but parents often don't know what to do about it.

Istook helped author the Children's Internet Protection Act, a law passed by Congress in 2000 requiring schools, libraries and other organizations receiving federal technology discounts to install filtering softwares.

"There are stories on the news every week about children becoming victims of Internet predators," Istook said.

As part of the Safe and Drug Free Schools program, Garrett in late fall sent letters about the "Missing" program to schools, encouraging them to use the free game.

"That should be done through leadership efforts by teachers and parents, rather than a mandate," she said.